

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED:

1. A composite sheet, comprising:
  - a fabric that is at least partially embedded in a polymeric sheet, with the fabric
  - 5 including warp yarns extending in a longitudinal direction and weft yarns extending in a lateral direction that is at least about perpendicular to the longitudinal direction, wherein: the polymeric sheet includes:
    - longitudinally extending edges that are laterally spaced apart from one
    - another,
    - 10 outer, longitudinally extending, first and second surfaces that extend laterally between, and are contiguous with, the edges, and
    - a thickness that is defined between, and substantially perpendicular to, the first and second surfaces;
    - all of the warp yarns of the composite sheet and all of the weft yarns of the
    - 15 composite sheet:
      - are positioned between the first and second surfaces, and
      - are not exposed at either of the first and second surfaces;
      - pluralities of longitudinally extending first and second areas of the polymeric sheet are arranged in an alternating, laterally extending series such that each of the first
      - 20 areas is contiguous with at least one of the second areas,
      - for each of the first areas:
        - at least a plurality of the weft yarns extend laterally through the first area,
        - and
        - at least a plurality of the warp yarns extend longitudinally through the first
        - 25 area; and
        - for each of the second areas:
          - none of the warp yarns of the composite sheet are located in the second
          - area;
          - at least a plurality of the weft yarns extend laterally through the second
          - 30 area;

the second area has a laterally extending width and includes all of the thickness of the polymeric sheet that is within the width, and the width of the second area is at least about 0.3 inches.

5           2.       A composite sheet according to claim 1, wherein the yarns are respectively interlaced with one another such that the fabric is woven.

              3.       A composite sheet according to claim 1, wherein all of the weft yarns of the composite sheet extend into each of the first and second areas.  
10

              4.       A composite sheet according to claim 1, wherein each first area includes at least three of the warp yarns.

              5.       A composite sheet according to claim 1, wherein at least a majority of the weft yarns of the composite sheet are monofilament yarns.  
15

              6.       A composite sheet according to claim 1, wherein none of the warp yarns of the composite sheet are exposed at either of the edges.

20           7.       A composite sheet according to claim 6, wherein none of the warp yarns of the composite sheet is closer than about 0.15 inches from either of the edges.

              8.       A composite sheet according to claim 1, wherein the composite sheet is in the form of an endless belt.  
25

              9.       An endless belt according to claim 8, wherein all of the warp yarns of the endless belt are fully encapsulated in the polymeric sheet.

              10.      An endless belt according to claim 8, wherein the endless belt extends around a plurality of rollers that carry the belt and are rotatably mounted to a frame.  
30

11. A composite sheet, comprising:  
a fabric that is at least partially embedded in a polymeric sheet, with the fabric including warp yarns extending in a longitudinal direction and weft yarns extending in a lateral direction that is at least about perpendicular to the longitudinal direction, wherein:  
5 the polymeric sheet includes:  
longitudinally extending edges that are laterally spaced apart from one another,  
outer, longitudinally extending, first and second surfaces that extend laterally between, and are contiguous with, the edges, and  
10 a thickness that is defined between, and substantially perpendicular to, the first and second surfaces;  
all of the warp yarns of the composite sheet and all of the weft yarns of the composite sheet:  
are positioned between the first and second surfaces, and  
15 are not exposed at either of the first and second surfaces;  
none of the warp yarns of the composite sheet are located in a longitudinally extending area of the polymeric sheet, with the area substantially extending between opposite ends of the polymeric sheet;  
at least a plurality of the weft yarns extend laterally through the area;  
20 the area is positioned between, and is substantially distant from, the longitudinally extending edges of the polymeric sheet;  
the area has a laterally extending width and includes all of the thickness of the polymeric sheet that is within the width, and  
the width is at least about 0.3 inches.  
25
12. A composite sheet according to claim 11, wherein the yarns are respectively interlaced with one another such that the fabric is woven.
13. A composite sheet according to claim 11, wherein all of the weft yarns of  
30 the composite sheet extend laterally through the area.

14. A composite sheet according to claim 11, wherein at least a majority of the weft yarns of the composite sheet are monofilament yarns.

5 15. A composite sheet according to claim 11, wherein none of the warp yarns of the composite sheet are located in a plurality of longitudinally extending areas of the polymeric sheet that are laterally spaced apart from one another and arranged in a laterally extending series, wherein for each area:

at least a plurality of the weft yarns extend laterally through the area;

10 the area is positioned between the longitudinally extending edges of the polymeric sheet;

the area has a laterally extending width and includes all of the thickness of the polymeric sheet that is within the width, and

the width is at least about 0.3 inches.

15

16. A composite sheet according to claim 11, wherein the area is positioned between first and second groups of the warp yarns, with each group including at least two of the warp yarns

20 17. A composite sheet according to claim 16, wherein each group includes at least three of the warp yarns.

18. A composite sheet according to claim 11, wherein none of the warp yarns of the composite sheet are exposed at either of the edges.

25

19. A composite sheet according to claim 18, wherein none of the warp yarns of the composite sheet is closer than about 0.15 inches from either of the edges.

20. A composite sheet according to claim 11, wherein the composite sheet is  
30 in the form of an endless belt.

21. An endless belt according to claim 20, wherein all of the warp yarns of the endless belt are fully encapsulated in the polymeric sheet.

5 22. An endless belt according to claim 20, wherein the endless belt extends around a plurality of rollers that carry the belt and are rotatably mounted to a frame.

23. A composite sheet, comprising:  
a fabric that is at least partially embedded in a polymeric sheet, with the fabric including a plurality of warp yarns extending in a longitudinal direction and a plurality of  
10 weft yarns extending in a lateral direction that is at least about perpendicular to the longitudinal direction,

wherein the plurality of warp yarns includes at least a first pair of adjacent warp yarns, and the warp yarns of the first pair of adjacent warp yarns are spaced apart from one another by at least about 0.3 inches.

15

24. A composite sheet according to claim 23, wherein the yarns are respectively interlaced with one another such that the fabric is woven.

25. A composite sheet according to claim 23, wherein at least a majority of the  
20 weft yarns of the composite sheet are monofilament yarns.

26. A composite sheet according to claim 23, wherein the plurality of warp yarns includes a plurality of pairs of adjacent warp yarns, and for each pair, the warp yarns of the pair are spaced apart from one another by at least about 0.3 inches.

25

27. A composite sheet according to claim 26, wherein:  
the plurality of pairs is a first group of pairs, and  
the plurality of warp yarns includes a second group of pairs of adjacent warp yarns, and for each pair of the second group, the warp yarns of the pair are spaced apart  
30 from one another by less than about 0.3 inches.

28. A composite sheet according to claim 23, wherein:  
the polymeric sheet includes:  
longitudinally extending edges that are laterally spaced apart from one  
another, and  
5 outer, longitudinally extending, first and second surfaces that extend  
laterally between, and are contiguous with, the edges;  
the warp and weft yarns at least partially occupy a portion of the polymeric sheet  
that is positioned between the first and second surfaces; and  
the warp and weft yarns are not exposed at the first surface.  
10
29. A composite sheet according to claim 28, wherein:  
warp yarns are absent from, and weft yarns extend laterally through, a  
longitudinally extending area of the composite sheet,  
the area is positioned between the warp yarns of the first pair of adjacent warp  
15 yarns,  
the area has a laterally extending width and includes the entire thickness of the  
composite sheet that is within the width, and  
the width is at least about 0.3 inches.
- 20 30. A composite sheet according to claim 28, wherein the warp and weft yarns  
are positioned between the first and second surfaces and are not exposed at the second  
surface.
- 25 31. A composite sheet according to claim 28, wherein the warp yarns are not  
exposed at the edges.
32. A composite sheet according to claim 31, wherein none of the warp yarns  
is closer than about 0.15 inches from either of the edges.
- 30 33. A composite sheet according to claim 23, wherein the composite sheet is  
in the form of an endless belt.

34. An endless belt according to claim 33, wherein all of the warp yarns of the endless belt are fully encapsulated in the polymeric sheet.

5 35. An endless belt according to claim 33, wherein the endless belt extends around a plurality of rollers that carry the belt and are rotatably mounted to a frame.

36. A method, comprising:  
cutting completely through a composite sheet for at least several feet, to form at  
10 least two separate pieces of the composite sheet, wherein:  
the composite sheet includes:  
longitudinally extending first and second edges that are laterally  
spaced apart from one another,  
an outer, longitudinally extending, first broad surface that extends  
15 laterally between, and is contiguous with, the first and second edges,  
an outer, longitudinally extending, second broad surface that  
extends laterally between, and is contiguous with, the first and second edges, and  
a thickness that is defined between, and substantially perpendicular  
to, the first and second broad surfaces;  
20 all of the warp yarns of the composite sheet and all of the weft yarns of the  
composite sheet:  
are positioned between the first and second broad surfaces, and  
are not exposed at either of the first and second broad surfaces;  
the cutting includes cutting in a longitudinal direction between a pair of  
25 adjacent warp yarns of the composite sheet to form at least several feet of longitudinally  
extending cut edges of each of the pieces such that none of the warp yarns are exposed at  
the cut edges.

37. A method according to claim 36, wherein the cutting includes cutting so  
30 that none of the warp yarns is closer than about 0.15 inches from either of the cut edges.

38. A method according to claim 36, further comprising joining opposite ends of one of the separate pieces of the composite sheet to one another to form of an endless belt.

5 39. A method according to claim 38, further comprising:  
extending the endless belt around a plurality of rollers that carry the belt and are rotatably mounted to a frame;  
then transporting a food item on the endless belt; and  
not sealing the cut edge of the endless belt prior to transporting the food item.

10 40. A method of providing a composite sheet which functions advantageously when exposed to fluid, comprising:  
processing a polymeric sheet, including at least partially embedding yarns in the polymeric sheet, so that:

15 the polymeric sheet is reinforced by at least some of the yarns, and  
at least portions of at least some of the yarns and at least a portion of the polymeric sheet are melted to one another at least at a region which is or becomes an edge of the polymeric sheet, so that the edge is substantially impermeable to the fluid.

20 41. A composite sheet, comprising:  
yarns that are at least partially embedded in a polymeric sheet, with the yarns extending in a longitudinal direction, wherein:  
the polymeric sheet includes:  
longitudinally extending edges that are spaced apart from one another in a  
25 lateral direction that is at least about perpendicular to the longitudinal direction,  
outer, longitudinally extending, first and second surfaces that extend laterally between, and are contiguous with, the edges, and  
a thickness that is defined between, and substantially perpendicular to, the first and second surfaces;  
30 all of the yarns:  
are positioned between the first and second surfaces, and



are not exposed at either of the first and second surfaces;  
pluralities of longitudinally extending first and second areas of the polymeric sheet are arranged in an alternating, laterally extending series such that each of the first areas is contiguous with at least one of the second areas,  
5 for each of the first areas, at least a plurality of the yarns extend longitudinally through the first area, and  
for each of the second areas:  
none of the yarns are located in the second area;  
the second area has a laterally extending width and includes all of the  
10 thickness of the polymeric sheet that is within the width, and  
the width of the second area is at least about 0.3 inches.